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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how religious practice and religious faith can protect Latino youth from problems in school and contribute to their academic success. Data were drawn from research on social capital and from three major national surveys with large samples of Latinos. Findings indicate that Latino students who actively attended church or who saw their religious faith as very important to their lives achieved higher grades in school; stayed on track in school; had less trouble with teachers, other students, and homework; and identified with school more strongly than did other Latino students. Religious practice was especially important for the educational success of Latino youth living in impoverished neighborhoods. Supervision of Latino teenagers--important for keeping youth on track in school--was strongly related to parents' religiosity. Moreover, religiously involved parents of Latino first graders spent more time with their children in ways important for educational development and for linking children to local organizations that provide educational opportunities. Not much evidence was found to support the notion that conservative Protestant Latinos form ethnic enclaves that hinder educational success. Any ethnic enclave effect in that group is perhaps offset by its high educational aspirations. Researchers, policymakers, and schools would do well to pay greater attention to resources that protect many Latino youth from downward assimilation. (Contains 86 references and 24 bar graphs) (TD)

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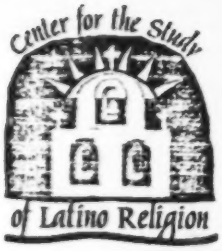
Religion Matters:
Predicting Schooling Success among Latino Youth



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Predicting Schooling Success among Latino Youth

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The three wavy lines shown here are a symbol from ancient times representing the human intellect in action. From *The Book of Signs*, collected, drawn, and explained by Rudolf Koch (London: The First Edition Club, 1930, page 8).

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Introduction

Does religion improve educational outcomes for Latino youth? Research on the educational trajectories of Latino immigrants in the United States is growing, but we know little about what role, if any, religion plays in the academic success or failure of Latino youth. Some research on the Latino experience in the United States has focused on the low quality of schools attended by Latinos and the alarming dropout rates among some segments of Latino youth (National Center for Education Statistics 1998). Up to 40 percent of foreign-born Latinos of school age, for example, are not enrolled in school (Hirschman 2001). In 1998, 1.5 million Latinos aged 16–24 were dropouts (NCES 1998), and estimates of dropout rates in 1999 are 21.6 percent for Hispanics compared to 11.5 percent for non-Hispanic whites (Hauser, Simmons, and Pager 2000). Does religion in some way protect Latino youth from getting off-track in school or from the negative consequences of impoverished inner city schools?

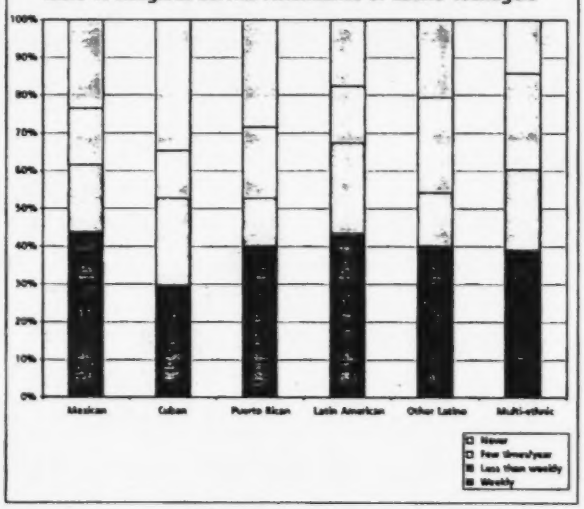
Other research finds positive trends. Some comparisons to non–Latino Americans show that the educational prospects for Latinos are markedly improving both in high school graduation and college completion (Lowell and Suro 2002). Second-generation Latinos may have the advantages of a first-generation family, highly motivated to advance socially and economically, without the tendency to join the ranks of the disenchanted—those whose cynical views of education and life prospects create a student 'oppositional culture' that is often found in inner city, minority schools (Ogbu 1989; Perlmann and Waldinger 1997; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Does religion have anything to do with these emerging positive trends in Latino educational achievement?

Most of the research on Latino education does not focus on the role of religion. We attempt here to investigate how religious practice, such as involvement in congregations, and other forms of religiosity, such as the importance of religious faith in life, can protect Latino kids from problems in school and contribute to their academic success. In this report we draw on research on social capital and the education of children to think through the ways in which religion may matter for Latino educational outcomes. We go on to search three major national surveys with

large samples of Latinos, the 1996 National Household Education Survey, the 1999 Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, and the 1996 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, for preliminary evidence on the relation between religiosity and religious tradition and educational success for Latino youth.

It is surprising that religion has been largely ignored as a source of educational success of Latino youth, though this neglect may simply mirror the research field on adolescents. We simply don't know much about the role of religion in adolescent life in general (Smith, Denton, Faris, and Regnerus 2002; Weaver, Samford, Morgan, Lichton, Larson, and Garbarino 2000). The omission is particularly conspicuous given the relatively high levels of religious belief and practice among Latinos and the importance of religion in many Hispanic families and communities. In fact, according to the 1996 National Household Education Survey, about 42 percent of Latino adolescents in the United States report that they attend religious services once a week or more. Most Latino nationalities are close to this average, with only the Cuban teenagers (at 30 percent) well below (Table 1). About 68 percent of Latin American teenagers and 62 percent of Mexican teenagers attend services more than a few times a year. In the 1999 Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey just over half of Latino parents with children in first grade reported that they attend religious services several times a month or more, and a remarkable 45 percent of these parents report that they discuss religion with their children several times a week or more. We will attempt to show how these high levels of religiosity may provide a powerful resource for educational achievement among Latino children.

Table 1: Religious Service Attendance of Latino Teenagers



Our question, then, is what role does religion play in protecting Latino youth from failing academically and in contributing to their educational success? In the pages

that follow we count the ways that religion among Latinos may help and/or hinder academic progress and provide data that is consistent with the claim that religion provides important social capital resources for the educational success of Latino youth. In particular, we find evidence that religiosity of parents enhances educational opportunities by playing an important role in Latino family dynamics, such as helping to maintain a traditional two-parent family and increasing parent-child interaction and parent supervision of children. We also find that religiosity among Latino teenagers is associated with stronger connections to school and staying 'on-track' educationally and that religion plays an especially positive role in supporting educational achievement among Latinos living in impoverished neighborhoods. Our analyses indicate that Latino religion is a crucial factor in fostering social capital—meaningful relationships within the church but also extending to the spheres of family and school—which promotes Latino educational advancement.

The Optimistic and Pessimistic Views of Latinos' Educational Future

A burgeoning literature on Latino education informs our search for the role of religion in Latino educational outcomes. Though we now have significant research on Latino education, however, there is less agreement about how to interpret the evidence.

Broadly speaking, there are two visions of the future of Latino immigrants in the US educational system. The optimists argue that, while it is not surprising that foreign-born children do less well in US schools, the second generation (or foreign-born children who immigrated when they were very young) and certainly the third generation will do reasonably well. Obviously, foreign-born children need time to overcome language barriers, and many may be spending more time and effort in the workforce than in schools. Assimilation processes for Latinos, the optimists argue, are proceeding at a similar pace to earlier white immigrant groups, for which the assimilation of the second generation was only partial (Alba and Nee 1997).

The pessimistic vision sees later generations of Latinos doing progressively worse (or no better) than their immigrant forebears. Later generations remain concentrated in overcrowded and underfunded public schools in inner city areas, in which the school and community environment are not conducive to educational

success (Mora 1997; Orfield and Eaton 1996; Roscigno 2000). Peer influence, inadequate school resources, and the lack of good teachers make it difficult for Latino youth to become motivated and equipped to do well in school (Steinberg, Brown, and Dornbusch 1996; Zhou 1997b). In this environment Latino kids become part of an 'oppositional culture' in schools, which sees American society and its school system as fundamentally unjust and exploitative and therefore sets little value on the middle-class American dream, including the importance of education (Matute-Bianchi 1991; Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 1995; Suarez-Orozco 1991). Meanwhile, the structure of labor markets and employment discrimination hinder Latino economic advancement (Portes and Zhou 1993; Sanchez 1997; Stolzenberg and Tienda 1997; Stolzenberg 1990). Many Latino families focus on finding dependable and secure jobs, especially for boys, and discount education beyond a high school diploma. In this social context Latino youth tend to see holding a stable job as more important than staying in school (Campbell 1995). In other words, the very work ethic and achievement drive of the first generation militates against subsequent generations' educational persistence (Rumbaut 1997). The result, according to the pessimists, is that later Latino generations are no closer to educational success in US schools or to socioeconomic mobility than the first generation (Hirschman and Falcon 1985).

This pessimistic vision underlies the concern that segments of the Latino population in the United States are in danger of becoming a permanent underclass (Portes and Rumbaut 1996). Many researchers see educational success as the key to overcoming social isolation, inner-city ethnic enclaves, and 'segmented assimilation' in which many Latinos are locked into the service sector of the economy and hindered from broader social integration (Portes and Zhou 1993; Reimers 1985; Zhou 1997a). New economic and demographic conditions, such as inner-city concentration and labor market segmentation, make it impossible for educationally underqualified Latinos to replicate the social and economic mobility of pre-1965 immigrant groups (Cavalcanti and Schleef 2001; Zhou 1997a).

Under current conditions the key to upward mobility is education, but the pessimists argue that successive generations of Latinos are likely to remain trapped in a cycle of academic underachievement. Some educational trends seem to fit the

pessimistic vision. Latino dropout rates in particular are worrisome and could indeed foretell the development of a permanent Latino underclass.

Evidence for these two visions is mixed. Clearly, there has been a marked difference between Latinos and non-Latino whites in the tendency to drop out of school (Fernandez, Paulsen, and Hirano-Nakanishi 1989; Trueba, Spindler, and Spindler 1989; Rumberger 1995). Some research argues that the pessimistic vision applies best to Latinos from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, for whom longer duration in the United States is not associated with greater educational success (Hirschman 2001; Wojtkiewicz and Donato 1995). Other research would add Mexican Americans, who constitute the vast majority of Latinos in the United States, to the list of those most educationally at-risk (Aguirre and Martinez 1993; De la Rosa and Maw 1990; Valencia 1991; Wojtkiewicz and Donato 1995), noting that Mexican Americans aged 16–24 are dropping out at three times the rate of Cuban Americans (National Center for Education Statistics 1995). Moreover, while the educational outcome gap between Latinos and non-Latino whites has narrowed, there persists a gap in high school and college completion (NCES 1995, 1998; Ganderton and Santos 1995; Hauser, Simmons, and Pager 2000). Regional studies in Florida and southern California actually show some decline in Latino student motivation and educational success the longer families are in the United States and certainly by the third generation (Portes and MacLeod 1996; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). This may indicate that later generations are losing the strong social support and motivation typically provided by first-generation parents, while Latino kids in dysfunctional public schools are taking on the oppositional culture of their non-Latino American peers. These results support a 'downward assimilation' model, in which later generations do less well than earlier ones, and there is some evidence that this model applies to Mexican Americans (Landale, Oropesa, and Llanes 1998; Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

In contrast there is some evidence that many Latino groups, including Mexican Americans, are doing better the longer they are in the United States (Hirshman 2001). Recent research casts doubt on the argument that Latinos will form a new underclass, languishing in poverty. Instead, while the gains for the Latino second generation in educational attainment, occupational achievement, and economic

status are less pronounced among Puerto Ricans and Mexicans than other Latino groups, second-generation Latinos are exceeding their first-generation parents in educational and occupational outcomes (Farley and Alba 2002). This may indicate that educational problems among most Latino groups will take care of themselves as Latinos become socially integrated into American society and culture. When comparing Latinos with everyone else born in the United States, the trends over the last thirty years show that the gap in high school graduation and college completion is diminishing and is likely to continue to do so (Lowell and Suro 2002). Some researchers would argue that the disadvantages of post-1965 immigrants are no worse than those of earlier immigrant groups, that oppositional cultures marked earlier immigrants as well, and that US society's increasing receptivity to immigrant incorporation bodes well for the eventual success of most Latino groups (Perlmann and Waldinger 1997).

Both of these visions of the Latino future in the United States may have some merit. The question is which Latino groups one is talking about and to what extent they are helped or disadvantaged. What is important for our purposes is how religion fits into this picture. We argue that the religious dimension may have a large role in deciding which of these two visions becomes a reality for individual Latinos.

Religion and Educational Outcomes for Latinos

What hinders or promotes educational advancement among Latinos? Why should we expect that religion matters for Latino educational success? We discuss below how Latino religion may affect family dynamics, extra-school learning, and social capital, all of which influence educational outcomes.

The Educational Impact of Congregations

The most direct connection between religious practice and educational success is the educational opportunities for parents and youth provided by congregations. Educational research points to the central role of educational opportunities outside of the classroom (Carbonaro 1998; Heyns 1978; Lareau 1987; Lareau 2000). On this score churches do more than is often acknowledged. Many churches provide tutoring for children and organize trips and outings that involve educational activities such as attending museums and cultural events. Many churches provide

classes for building language skills for parents and children. Evidence for this is found in the 1998 National Congregations Study, conducted by Mark Chaves with funding from the Lilly Endowment. These data show that there are abundant educational opportunities for Latinos in churches. Our analysis of this survey shows, for example, that congregations with higher percentages of Latinos are more likely to report that they have a group meeting in the church for educational purposes other than religious education. Educational outcomes may be better for Latino youth in religious families for the simple reason that congregations are an important source of 'extracurricular' learning.

In addition, active religious participation may increase extra-school learning because religious practices often include concrete activities that are educational, such as parents reading and discussing the Bible and other church materials with children and children reading and memorizing the Bible, learning to sing in a choir, and so on (Galindo and Escarmilla 1995). It is also possible that the value of learning is reinforced indirectly by the importance placed within the church on reading Scriptures and being able to teach the truths of the faith. That the pastor or priest is expected to do some study before preaching the Gospel itself provides a context that subtly reinforces the ultimate value of learning. While it is difficult to uncover direct evidence that a high regard for teaching in the church affects youths' academic aspirations, we do find in our empirical analysis below that religious Latino parents engage in more activities with their children that enhance the family learning environment.

Religion, Social Capital, and Education

Besides specific educational activities of the church, there is the less visible role of churches in enhancing social capital, that is, social ties marked by trust and reciprocity, which provides important resources for the educational success of children (Coleman 1988; Ream 2001). Disadvantaged families in particular may lack the social contacts and the network ties that are necessary for children to reach their academic potential (Coleman and Husén 1985), and some research has shown that this applies to Latinos (Campbell 1995; Ream 2001). That a high level of geographic mobility among Latinos disrupts social capital is an important reason for lower

educational achievement among Latinos, especially among Mexican Americans (Ream 2001). Religion is likely to help mitigate these social capital deficits. As we argue below, religious involvement in congregations increases 'trust-ful' social ties in the church, family, and school that improve the odds that Latino children will reach their academic potential.

Social Capital in Congregations

Religion may provide for Latinos an important source of social capital that can be put to use for the educational success of children. Active involvement in and commitment to a congregation provides an important source of social ties marked by trust and reciprocity (Verba *et al.* 1995), which may in turn give access to resources that contribute to the education of children (Bankston and Zhou 2002).

One of the most important resources for educational success embedded in social capital is information and values (Coleman 1988; Morgan and Sorenson 1999). Congregations can make a difference on this score. For example, Latino churches may be relatively successful in bringing diverse people together (Wuthnow 2002), which opens up opportunities for parents and children to develop links to alternate sources of educational values and information that may be helpful for understanding the educational process or developing educational goals. Parents who participate in church regularly may draw on church-based social capital to find out information about quality schools and teachers or to learn about good job opportunities and the importance of higher education to secure these jobs. Church participation enhances opportunities for parents to connect with others who can relay information on how schools work, and how to negotiate the students' 'school career.' In many cases, Latinos lack knowledge about the steps to take to do well in school (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Tornatzky, Cutler, and Lee 2002). This extends to career aspirations and achievement of Latinos: many Latino parents simply lack the knowledge or resources to propel their children into professional positions (Campbell 1995). Social capital available in churches may help to remedy this deficit by exposing Latino families to knowledge and resources available in diverse social networks.

The effectiveness of congregations in linking Latino families to broader social networks may depend on the religious tradition of the congregation. Latinos in

Catholic parishes, in which religious proscriptions help to ensure that all Catholics within the parish neighborhood attend the same church, may provide a high level of diversity within the congregation compared to Latino conservative Protestant congregations, which tend to provide the nucleus for an ethnic and language enclave.

There is a second source of educational benefits through church social capital. Participation in congregations is likely to contribute to a network structure that James Coleman has dubbed "intergenerational closure," which is important for transmitting the values and norms of the community to the next generation (Coleman 1988; Coleman and Hoffer 1987). Participation in churches may increase the likelihood that parents know the parents of their children's friends, which provides an important mechanism of social control that keeps kids on-track in school (Portes and Rumbaut 1996). That kind of network closure is important for identity formation for youth, which includes instilling the values of the community, such as discipline and respect for parental authority. While first-generation immigrant Latinos have a strong achievement ethic, it is difficult to pass this on to the second and especially the third generations, which are likely to be more heavily influenced by American popular culture through the media and peers (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Social capital generated in churches may increase the likelihood that parental authority is respected and community values and norms are transmitted to the next generation.

Social capital available within congregations may have positive educational benefits indirectly through the organizational links between congregations and community organizations. Research has shown the role of nonpolitical organizations, especially churches, in fostering civic participation. Congregations become an organizational base for recruitment to other civic organizations (Verba et al. 1995). Higher levels of church participation place individuals in effective recruitment networks. Thus, congregational involvement becomes an avenue to involvement in civic organizations in the local community. And a higher level of involvement in civic organizations in the community offers a number of potential benefits for a child's education. First, just as church involvement increases opportunities to interact with diverse persons, the increase in social contacts within civic organizations offers greater access to information necessary to make good educational decisions

(Granoveter 1973). Second, involvement in civic organizations increases opportunities for families to connect with educational opportunities in the community, such as educational services in libraries, cultural events in the community, and museums and other educational organizations. Finally, civic involvement has positive effects on family life that may improve educational life chances for children. Civic participation outside the church improves paternal involvement in the family, especially for lower socioeconomic-status fathers (Wilcox and Sikkink 2002). Father involvement, research shows, is especially crucial for the educational success of children (Schneider and Coleman 1993). In the next section we take up more direct ways in which religious participation changes family dynamics to the educational benefit of Latino children.

Religion and Family Social Capital

Educational success of children depends heavily on 'family social capital', which is higher in two-parent families with strong relationships between parent and child (Coleman and Hoffer 1987; Ream 2001). Religious belief and practice are likely to lead to more stable families, with higher levels of parent-child interaction. In this way religion is associated with family dynamics that improve educational chances for children.

Research on Latino school enrollment, for example, shows the major role that an intact, traditional family plays in influencing whether family members will stay in school (Hirshman 2001; Rumbaut 1996; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Campbell 1995). The traditional family is associated with reduced intergenerational conflict, which has been shown to derail high educational aspirations and achievement (Rumbaut 1994). Longer duration in the United States is associated with an increase in single-parent families, especially among Dominicans and Cubans and, to a lesser extent, Mexicans (Landale and Oropesa 1995). Religion may mitigate this trend. The well-established relationship between the two-parent family and persisting in school, especially for Latino boys, is one path through which religion has positive effects on educational outcomes. While we don't test all the paths in this causal chain in our analyses below, we do find survey evidence for the perhaps not too surprising positive relationship between religious involvement and support for two-parent families. In our sample of Latino families with first-grade children (detailed below),

we find a positive association between religious involvement of parents and intact traditional families. Since intact families are associated with greater educational success for children, we can surmise that parent religious practice increases educational success for children by helping to ensure stable families.

The importance of family social capital to school success extends to the character of the relationship between parent and child. As noted above, religious involvement increases parents' 'focus on the family', including times of reading religious materials or singing religious songs together. The spiritual nurture of children has a sacred importance for the more religious, which increases the amount of time and energy that parents are expected to put into child-rearing (Wilcox 1998). The tasks of maintaining family religiosity, such as Bible reading with children, family devotions, and family meals, increase the extent of parent-child interaction (Wilcox 2002).

In addition, research on parent involvement shows that a higher than average level of home supervision of children—a form of family social capital—within Hispanic families leads to positive educational effects (Sui Chu and Willms 1996). But this research ignores the potential role of religion in family dynamics. Religion may improve educational outcomes by increasing the motivation for and extent of supervision of children. The focus of religion on the discipline and nurture of the younger generation may increase the commitment of Latino parents to provide effective supervision of their children. Religious leaders, through sermons and personal conversations, may reinforce the importance of personal accountability of children and the legitimacy of parental authority in maintaining this accountability.

Religion and School Social Capital

Religious participation in congregations, we argue, increases the civic skills necessary for active participation in schools. Sidney Verba et al. (1995) have shown how involvement in churches strengthens organizational skills, sociability, speaking and writing skills, and so on, and how this increases political participation. It is a small step to extend this argument to include participation in educational institutions. Parallel to the argument of Verba and colleagues, we argue that social capital built within churches enhances civic skills that facilitate parent involvement in school. Churches provide one of the most important sites at which disadvantaged parents gain the civic skills and connections that facilitate involvement in civic life

(Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). It is likely that these civic skills are transferable to involvement in PTA, volunteering at school, and perhaps even helping children with homework.

Besides developing civic skills, church involvement may increase parent participation in schools and student attachment to school by helping to bridge the gap between Latino families and schools. Church involvement may provide an organizational bridge between the family and school; church social capital may actually enhance school social capital. Latinos tend to feel high levels of alienation from public school culture which values professionalism, technical expertise, and bureaucratic organization (Lopez, Scribner, and Mahitivanicha 2001; Sikkink 1999). This bifurcated world of family and school makes Hispanic parents feel less comfortable getting involved in school and perhaps less likely to challenge (if necessary) the expertise of teachers and administrators. That school and home are worlds apart causes some Hispanic parents to disengage from their adolescents' education (though they may focus on education of the younger children), since they are not as comfortable with the more advanced years of education and assume that their teenagers know more than they do about their own education. Compared to middle-class whites, for example, Latino teenagers may have less immediate support for their later years in high school and during their early decisions on postsecondary education (Rumberger et al. 1990).

We expect that church participation increases opportunities for parents to know and discuss schooling issues with other parents who have children in the school. In the church setting, parents may come to know a teacher or administrator from the school (or gain a network tie to someone from the school) and obtain the civic skills that make them more effective in being involved in schools and negotiating the bureaucratic structure of public schools. For these reasons, we expect that Latino parents and children with high levels of religious involvement in congregations will have higher educational aspirations, greater attachment to school, and more success in school.

Religious Schools and School Social Capital

Religious schools provide another pathway in which religion builds school social capital for Latinos by reducing the school-family divide. Latinos are well-represented in Catholic schools—in fact, the Catholic school population includes a

higher percentage of Latinos (7.4 percent) than the public schools. Some research has shown that Catholic schools provide an important context in which Latino youth can thrive academically (Bryk, Lee, and Holland 1993; Coleman and Hoffer 1987). Attending a religious school may be especially important for Latino families when such schools are able to successfully lower the boundary between school and home that hinders academic success for children (Stanton-Salazar 1997). One of the important ways that this boundary harms academic achievement is that parents are less likely to be active at the school. Perception of the boundary discourages parents from volunteering in the classroom, attending a PTA meeting, or attending a class event—all of which are important for reinforcing the importance of education for their children and gaining information and access that parents can use to shepherd their children through their school career. Other research reveals the relative success of religious schools in getting less educated parents involved in school activities (Sikkink 2001). We expect that the same process is at work for Latino parents in Catholic schools.

The Potential Downside of Religious Social Capital in Latino Communities

There is an alternative hypothesis to consider: that in some cases religion increases the strength of a Latino ethnic enclave, which may reinforce lower aspirations for educational achievement. As many analysts have argued, this is the downside of tight social networks that lack bridges to outside resources (Fernandez-Kelly 1995; Portes and Landolt 1996; Putnam 2000). We know that ethnic communities matter for educational outcomes (Portes and MacLeod 1996); it is possible that involvement in religious congregations only reinforces this ethnic enclave effect. Evidence does point to the fact that ethnic loyalty creates conflicts between educational aspirations and achievement and the ethnic community (Niemann, Romero, and Arbona 2000). If religion is intertwined with an ethnic community, it may reinforce ethnic loyalty and ensure that the conflict is resolved by maintaining ties with the community rather than focusing on educational goals. Dropping out of school for family reasons and an unwillingness to pursue higher education at the top colleges and universities—especially if that means moving away from the community to attend college—may result from a strong ethnic community. And religion may reinforce this effect.

We know that this happens in some white conservative Protestant communities (Darnell and Sherkat 1997; Rose 1988), and it may also apply to conservative Protestant Latinos. Latino Pentecostals in particular may be embedded in a network structure in which family, church, and ethnic community ties overlap and tend to wall out the outside world. The high level of tension that Latino conservative Protestants (especially Pentecostals) maintain between their community and the dominant American culture would reinforce the social boundary with the outside world. If educational values are low within this community, the strength of the inward-looking social bonds of the religio-ethnic community is likely to ensure that these low aspirations are passed on to the next generation.

In a similar vein, it is possible that intergenerational closure can be too strong, which might limit exposure to information and values that encourage educational pursuits and provide the know-how to achieve lofty educational goals. Some would argue that religion contributes only to reinforcing norms and values that discount educational success, rather than providing 'horizon-expanding' links to other values outside the ethnic community that encourage and facilitate educational success (Morgan and Sorensen 1999). Our hypothesis is that for Latinos religious involvement offers bridges to community organizations and access to horizon-expanding knowledge and resources, rather than simply norm-reinforcement.

Religion and Social Capital in Impoverished Neighborhoods

If we are right about the relation of religion, social capital, and educational outcomes for Latino youth, we would expect to find that religion is crucial for the educational outcomes of Latino youth in impoverished neighborhoods. Religion may be particularly important in protecting Latino kids in the inner city from the negative educational effects of their school and community environment. Religious organizations provide some of the only remaining forms of social support in many inner city areas (Wood 2002), and religion does provide a protective barrier between poor schooling outcomes in the inner city and African American kids (Regnerus 2000; Cook 2000). Some studies show that religion is especially important to educational success in that it contributes to family and employment stability, which may matter most for families in inner-city neighborhoods. Social capital deficits are much larger in run-down neighborhoods riddled with high crime and a crumbling

civic infrastructure (Putnam 2000). We would expect to find, as with African Americans, that religion would provide a protective umbrella for the educational success of Latino kids challenged by inner-city conditions (Regnerus 2000, 2001). We discuss our evidence for this below.

Findings

Our main tests of these theoretical claims involve regression analyses of three national surveys, one of Latino families with first-grade children and the other two of Latino families with teenage children. The positive effect on educational outcomes of religious practice on congregational, family, and school social capital for Latino parents and youth, combined with the educational opportunities available within congregations, should be evident in the survey data. What we see in our empirical findings is that religious practice of parents is positively related to a family environment that fosters educational success, such as high educational aspirations and increased parent-child interaction. We also expect that Latino teenagers who are more religious (as measured by participation in congregations and importance of faith) will be doing better in school, including higher levels of attachment to school, less trouble in school, and higher grades. These positive effects of religion on educational outcomes should be particularly strong for Latino youth in disadvantaged neighborhoods. With a few exceptions, our analyses presented in this section support these claims as well.

Parent Religion and Learning for First Graders: Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey

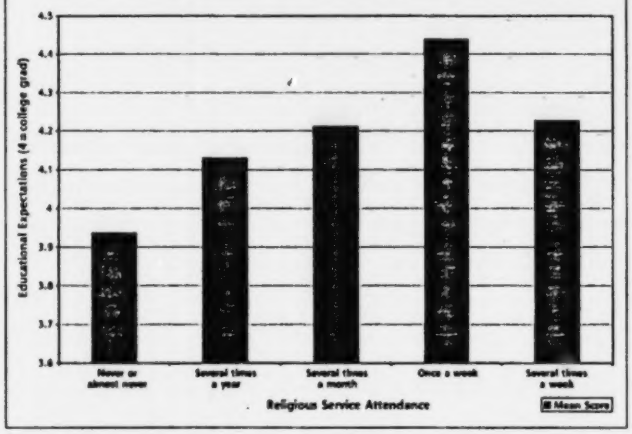
Our first set of analyses, which are drawn from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey (ECLS), focuses on the relationship between parent religiosity and educational aspirations and activities that promote learning for first-grade Latinos. The ECLS, a nationally representative survey funded by the National Center for Education Statistics and conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, included about 2,900 Latino children who began kindergarten in 1999. The latest ECLS wave collected data on children at the end of their first-grade year. The survey's strengths include detailed information on schools, classrooms, teachers, parents, and children. While the survey is light on religion

measures, it does include a standard measure of parents' attendance at religious services and a measure of the extent that parents discuss religion with their children.

Educational Aspirations for Children

One of the most notable findings that the survey reveals is that parents' religious attendance and parent-child discussion of religion are both positively related to Latino parents' educational aspirations for their children. The survey asked parents what degree they expected their child to achieve, and responses ranged from less than high school to a PhD, MD, or other advanced degree. Table 2 shows a reasonably strong bivariate relationship between higher church attendance and higher educational expectations among Latino parents. Our measure of educational expectations runs from 1, which indicates less than high school graduation, to 6, which indicates advanced degree completion. The average educational expectation score for those who never attend religious services is less than a college education, while the average score for those who attend religious services once a week is well above a college graduate. In moving from the weekly attenders to the *more* than weekly attenders there is a slight drop off in average educational expectations. This may provide limited support for the concern that extremely high levels of religious involvement may be associated with a lower value placed on education. The slightly lower score may provide some credence to concerns about Latino ethnic/religious enclaves having a negative influence on educational outcomes, especially if the enclave is 'norm-reinforcing' (Morgan and Sorenson 2000). At the same time, the average score is still above the expectation of achieving a college education and much higher than the average educational expectations score for parents who never attend religious services. To further illustrate mean differences across religious attendance

Table 2: Latino Parent's Educational Expectations for Children



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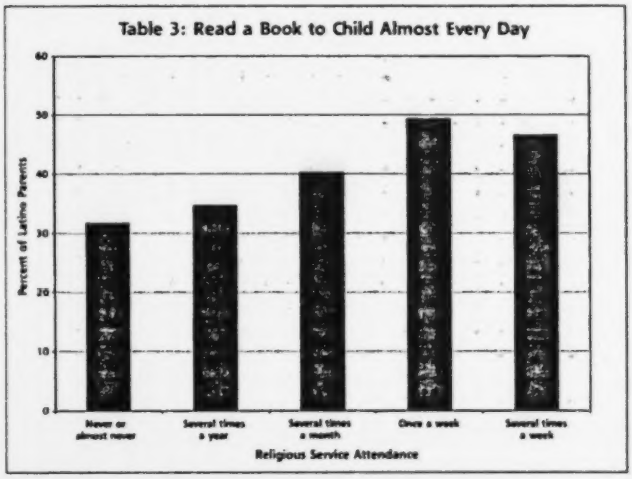
categories, we point out that 43 percent of Latino parents who attend religious services once a week expect their children to achieve more than a college education, while only 30 percent of Latinos who never attend religious services have such high expectations for their children.

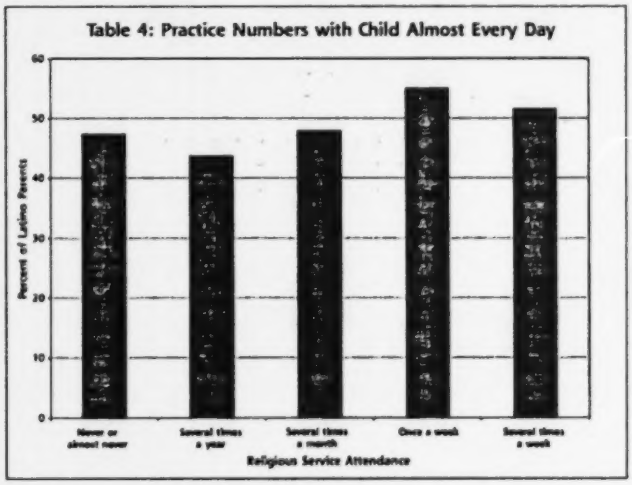
The positive relationship between religious involvement and educational aspirations for children holds up even after accounting for differences among families in parental socioeconomic status, mother's education, urban location, private schooling for children, and other factors that may influence educational expectations. After controlling for these differences, we still find that Latino parents who attend more religious services or talk more with their children about religion have significantly greater educational expectations for their children.

On the whole, the survey evidence supports the view that parent religious involvement is not hindering educational expectations, as the religio-ethnic enclave theories would predict. Instead, the higher educational expectations of more religious parents is consistent with the theory that social capital generated in churches provides links to diverse social networks, through which high educational aspirations can be mediated.

Religion, Family Dynamics, and Educational Opportunities

We find in the ECLS Latino sample that religious attendance is positively related to some parent-child activities that promote learning. Higher-attending Latinos are more likely to read books to their children, which of course plays a major role in success in reading (Heyns 1978). The results show that 49 percent of parents who attend religious services weekly read to their child every day, while only 32 percent of parents who never attend religious services do so (Table 3). The findings do not allow us to conclude that religious attendance, net of other factors such as parental education, is significantly associated with the extent to which parents do math and writing with their children. But, looking at a more specific question about doing academic work with children, we do find that if parents are highly involved in their congregation or discuss religion with their children, net of the other variables in the statistical model, they are more likely to practice numbers with a child. In the bivariate findings 55 percent of Latino weekly attenders practice numbers almost every day, compared to 47 percent of those who never attend (Table 4). In addition,





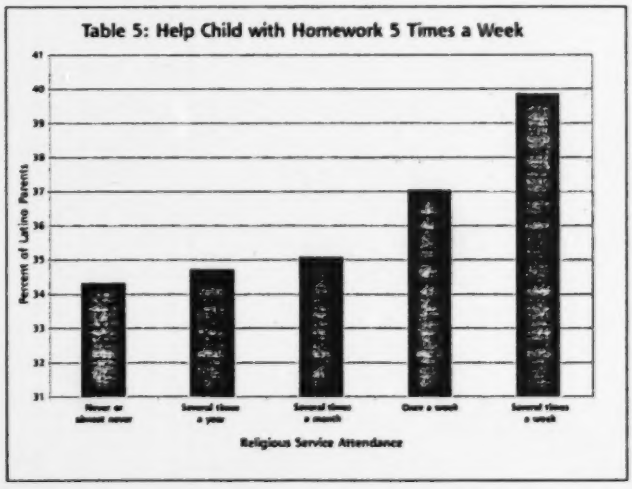


Table 5 shows that higher attenders tend to be slightly more active in helping their children with homework five times a week: about 40 percent of the highest-attending parents compared to 34 percent of the never-attending. Most of the differences by religious category are not large. While the weekly attenders are quite high on this measure, they are not as involved as parents who attend either more than weekly or several times a month. This difference may explain why we don't find that religious attendance leads to significant differences in helping with homework after we control for other factors, such as parent's educational level, private schooling, and intact family.

We do find that higher-attending Latinos have higher levels of other forms of interaction with

their children that may contribute to educational success. For example, the high-attending Latinos are more likely to sing songs with and tell stories to their children. Of the highest-attending Latino parents 62 percent sing songs with their children three or more times per week, compared to 48 percent of parents who never attend religious services (Table 6). Some parents never sing songs with their children, but we found that only 5 percent of the highest-attending parents never do so, while 15 percent of the nonattenders never sing with their child. Regarding telling stories to children three times a week or more, we find that 62 percent of high attenders do this, compared to 46 percent of nonattenders (Table 7). Reading to children, singing songs, and telling stories are a natural outgrowth of activities experienced in religious congregations. And we find that these differences hold up even after accounting for other factors related to attendance and interaction with children, such as parents' education and socioeconomic status.

We also find that religious involvement of parents, net of other factors, is positively related to the frequency of helping the child with doing art (Table 8 shows the bivariate relationship), and there is weak evidence that religious parents more frequently play games with their children. Latino parents who discuss religious matters with their children are also more likely to spend time teaching their children about nature and to spend time building things with their

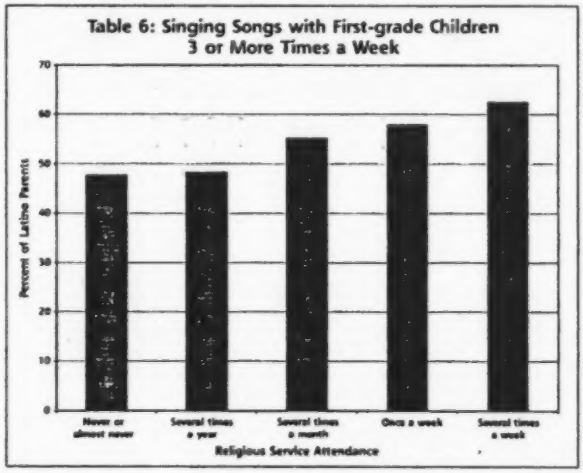


Table 6: Singing Songs with First-grade Children
3 or More Times a Week
Percent of Latino Parents
Religious Service Attendance

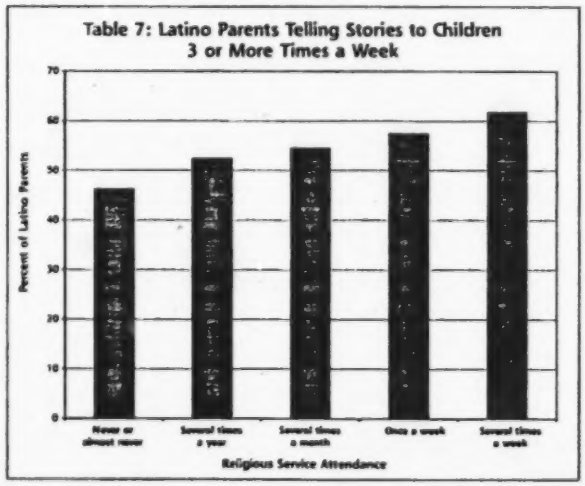
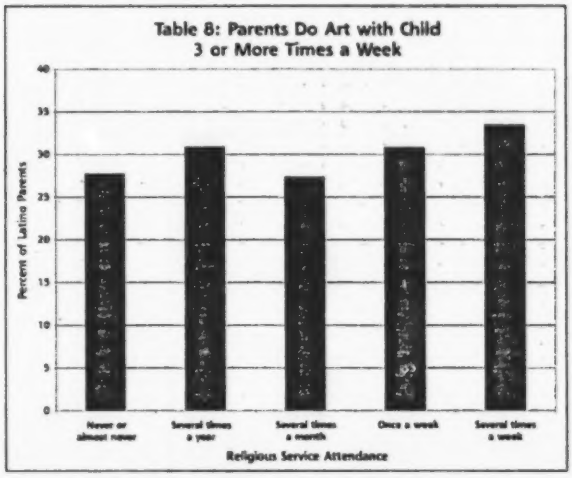
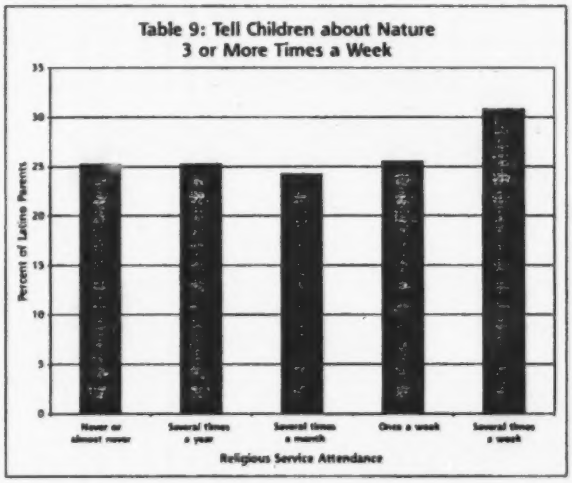


Table 7: Latino Parents Telling Stories to Children
3 or More Times a Week
Percent of Latino Parents
Religious Service Attendance





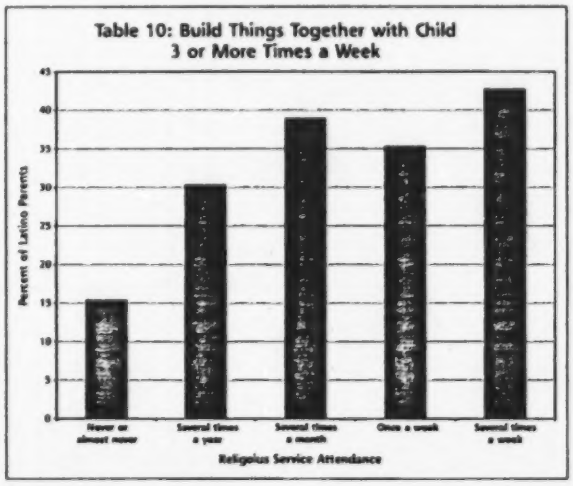
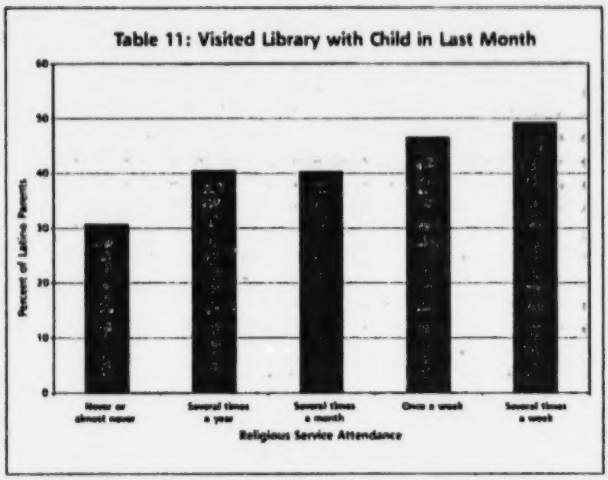
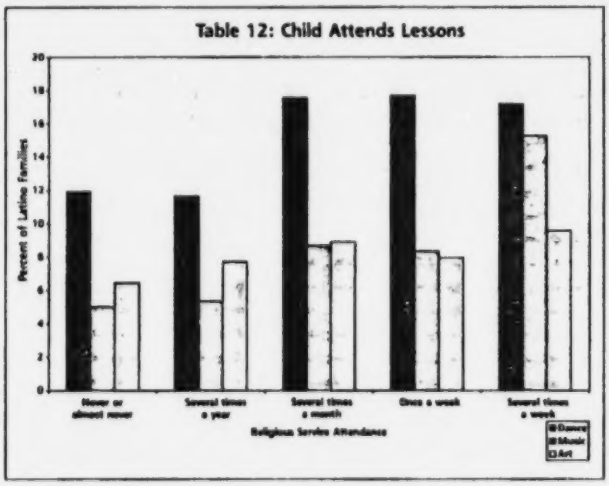


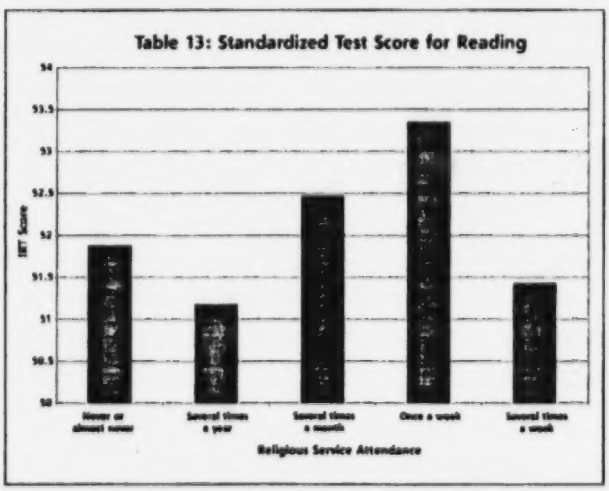
Table 10: Build Things Together with Child
3 or More Times a Week
Percent of Latino Parents
Religious Service Attendance

children (Tables 9 and 10 provide bivariate relationships).

In the ECLS data, we also find that church attendance is positively related to visiting a library with the child, net of the other demographic variables. About 49 percent of high-attending parents had visited the library with a child in the last month, compared to 31 percent of the nonattending parents (Table 11). This finding is consistent with our claim that religious involvement provides a pathway for Latinos to community organizations. Table 12 shows the percentage of parents who have a child in dance, music, or art lessons. Though not significantly related to having children in art lessons (net of other variables), religiously involved parents are more likely than the less involved to place their children in dance lessons. Similarly, we find that the religiously active parents are much more likely to have their children in music lessons. About 15 percent of high attenders have their first graders







in music lessons, compared to only 5 percent of the nonattenders. This may result from the importance of music in the church and also may indicate that religious involvement opens up pathways to other organizations in the community.

We turn next to the relationship between religiosity of parents and first graders' standardized test scores in reading, science, and general knowledge. Table 13 shows the bivariate relationship between religious attendance of parents and children's reading test scores. It shows that children of weekly attenders have the highest reading scores, though Latino families that attend more than once a week have slightly lower average test scores than children in families that never attend. Since reading test scores are strongly related to family socioeconomic status, we are cautious about interpreting the bivariate findings.

Interestingly, our preliminary regression analysis, which controls for socioeconomic status of parents and other factors, reveals that parent religious attendance is not *directly* related (positively or negatively) to Latino first graders' scores on standardized tests in science and in general knowledge. In these models we find some evidence that parent religious attendance is positively related to first graders' scores on reading tests, though these effects are not particularly strong. The positive but weak relationship is given more credence since it is consistent with our earlier finding of higher levels of book reading in more religious Latino families.

In general, our preliminary analysis did not show strong direct effects of religious attendance among Latinos on standardized test scores of children, though the effects on reading are hopeful. It seems likely that parent religious attendance is too far removed from standardized test scores administered in schools to have a strong direct effect on test scores. Perhaps the effect of religion on academic outcomes is stronger on grades, and is a more direct function of child religiosity at older ages (see our evidence below). But parent religious attendance may have a much closer connection to family dynamics, as we argued above, and we find fairly consistent positive effects of parent religiosity and educational opportunities within the family.

Despite some mixed findings, then, we can conclude that religious involvement is related to increased educational opportunities for first-grade Latino children in several ways, especially through increased reading and other forms of parent interaction with children and by increasing connections to community institutions that provide educational opportunities for children. This is consistent with the view that social capital generated within churches can provide important educational resources for Latino youth.

Evidence in the Teen Years: 1996 National Household Education Survey

For evidence on the relationship of religion and family social capital, we turn to the 1996 National Household Education Survey, funded by the US Department of Education, which includes a national sample of about 2,800 Hispanics. For the approximately 1,400 parents of children in the sixth through twelfth grade, the survey asked a parent respondent whether anyone from the family had "discussed with the child how he/she would manage his/her time?" Our analysis of the data

shows that church attendance among Latinos is strongly related to time management discussions with the child. Net of a rigorous set of controls for parent education, family income, private school attendance, parent work status, intact family, age of the child, and so on, Latino parents who attend religious services nearly every week are 30 percent more likely to discuss time management with their children than parents who only attend religious services several times a year.

The survey also asked whether anyone in the family had in the past month "discussed [child's] future high school courses or plans for after high school with him/her?" Again, Latinos who attend church more frequently are far more likely to discuss future plans with their children. In a model that controls for other differences that may be related both to child discussions and religion, we still find among Latinos that the most frequent attenders are 24 percent more likely to have discussed future plans with the child than those parents who attend services several times a year.

Since parent indifference is a major cause of student disengagement from academics (Pellerin 2001), religion can play a key role in student educational success by reinforcing norms of family cohesion and parent involvement in children's lives. These findings are consistent with our earlier ECLS findings on the family social-capital benefits of religion for first-grade children.

Our analysis of the 1996 National Household Education Survey also reveals that Latino parents with children in Catholic and other religious schools are much more highly involved in school activities than Latino parents in any other type of school, including private nonreligious schools or public schools of choice. Moreover, these findings hold after accounting for differences in parent income, education, age, English-language use, church attendance, region, and community size. The findings confirm that less educated Latino parents are as likely to be involved in Catholic schools as the more educated parents—which is particularly surprising since higher education is one of the strongest predictors of greater parental participation in schools and other civic organizations (Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry 1996). This finding for Catholic schools contrasts with Latino parents in neighborhood public schools, in which the less educated Latino parents are much less likely than the more

educated to be active in their children's school. This phenomenon may partly explain why some researchers have found that Catholic schools have an advantage over public schools in fostering educational success for those of lower socioeconomic status and for ethnic minority children (Coleman and Hoffer 1987; Bryk, Lee, and Holland 1993). From these findings, it seems credible that religion plays a role in protecting Latino youth from educational setbacks and in ensuring that they reach their educational potential, in part because it provides a bond between the Latino family and religious schools.

Evidence in the Teen Years: National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health

Our second set of teen analyses looks at the relationship between teenager religiosity and educational outcomes among Latinos. This analysis relies on the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, which is a panel survey that collected data on children, schools, and families in 1994 and again in 1996. The panel data allow us better to test causal relationships between religiosity, which is measured in Wave 1 of the survey, and subsequent educational outcomes. This panel survey is a nationally representative sample of students in the seventh through twelfth grade, randomly selected from schools in the United States that had an eleventh grade and at least 30 students. We used data on the 1,236 Latinos in the sample.

In most analyses we find that religion protects Latino youth from negative educational trajectories and spurs them on to higher levels of academic achievement and aspiration. Since these positive effects are also linked to the education and occupation of household heads, family income, household composition, and family size (Warren 1996), we include controls for the education of the parent(s), nationality (Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, other Latin American, and other), gender and age of the child, percentage of Latinos in the school, traditional intact family, private schooling, and region.

Our religion measures for the Latino teenagers include frequency of attendance at church services and importance of faith in 1994. We also include measures of religious affiliation. About 56 percent of Latino youth report that they are Catholic, and we know that Latino youth tend to be over-represented in Catholic, Jehovah's Witness, and Adventist religious traditions (Smith et al. 2002). We include variables

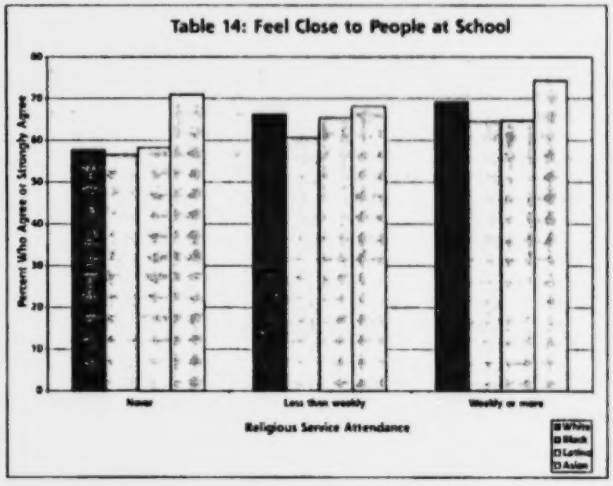
for affiliation with one of the following religious traditions: conservative Protestant, Pentecostal, Catholic, and other.

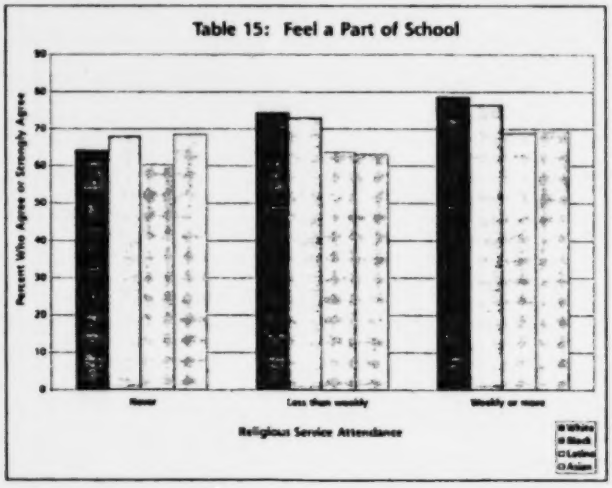
Identifying with School

The Adolescent Health Survey asked kids whether they agreed or disagreed with the following:

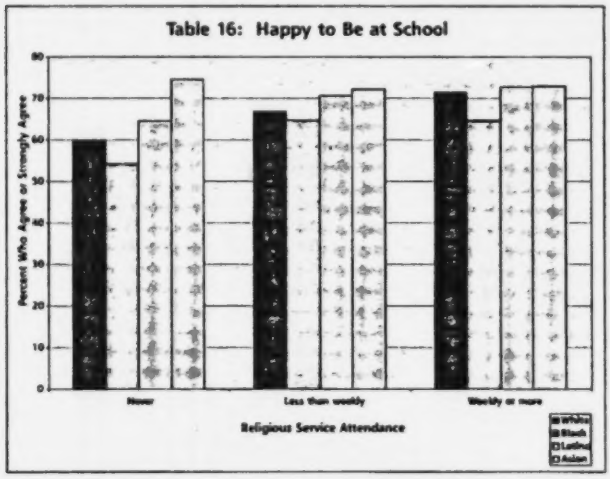
You feel close to people at your school.
You feel like you are part of your school.
You are happy to be at your school.

The cross-tabulations of these variables with religion and ethnicity are shown in Tables 14, 15, and 16. Latinos attending religious services weekly or more are more likely than those who do not attend to agree or strongly agree that they felt close to people at school. Of the weekly attenders about 65 percent felt close to people at school, while 58 percent of those who never attend religious services felt close to people at school. For the question of whether the respondent feels a part of the school (Table 15), Latino religious attendance did not affect the percentage who *strongly* agreed with this statement (weekly=23 percent; never=23 percent). Adding together the two categories 'strongly agree' and 'agree but not strongly', we found that about 69





percent of weekly attenders agreed or strongly agreed that they are a part of the school and only 60 percent of the nonattenders felt the same. It is possible that highly religious Latinos experience some conflict between their faith and a secular public school, so it is difficult for them to agree strongly that they feel a part of the school (even while they are not likely to *disagree* with the statement either). Lastly, 73 percent of weekly attenders agreed or strongly agreed that they are happy to be at their school, though only 65 percent of those who do not attend religious services had similar feelings (Table 16). At least in the simple bivariate findings, religion appears to matter a great deal for Latino attachment to school. Our regression analysis will test whether these associations hold after accounting for other differences that may be related to religious attendance, such as parent education and nationality.

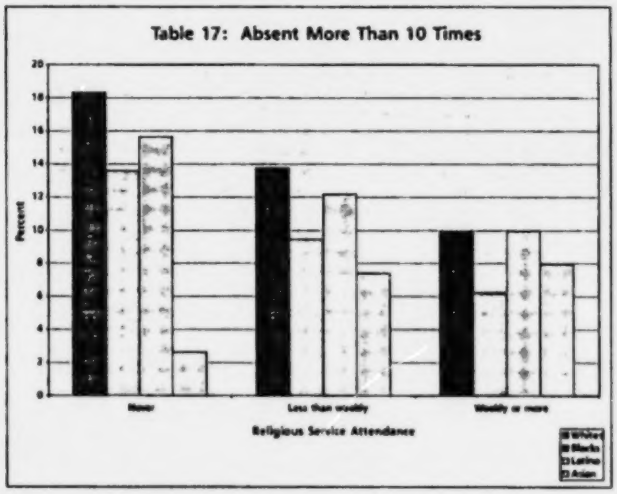


We next created an index that added together responses to the three statements about connecting with school to create a measure of attachment to school and ran a regression to predict those who are more strongly attached to school, net of other factors such as parent education and child age. We find that religiosity of children, including attendance at religious services and a stronger sense of the importance of faith, is significantly positively related to the child's attachment to school. Of course it is possible that greater attachment to school by the child leads to increased religiosity, rather than the reverse. But we also found that change in religiosity is associated with increased attachment to school. Essentially, Latino youth who were less religious (by our measures) in 1994 but became more religious by 1996 are associated with higher average scores on our measure of attachment to school. And Latino youth who showed a decline in religiosity over that time period were in the end less attached to school. This finding makes clear that religiosity among Latino

youth plays a role in binding Latinos to school. The evidence is consistent with the claim that declining religiosity among Latino youth may exacerbate problems of school dropout. The evidence points to an important role of religion in guarding Latino youth from the pool of students at risk of dropping out of school.

Staying in School

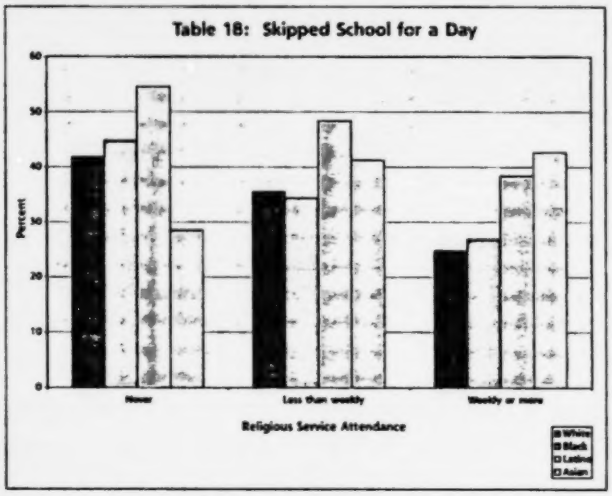
Dropping out of school is more likely for students who have had trouble in school, such as cutting class and being suspended (Velez 1989). We can shed light on how religion keeps Latinos from dropping out by analyzing the relationship between religion and staying on-track in school and staying out of trouble in school.



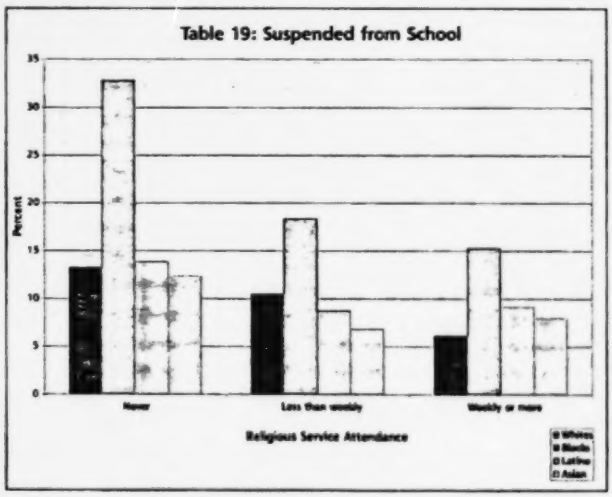
The first measure of being 'on-track' is the number of times that the student reported being absent from school for a full day with an excuse, such as being sick or out of town. Of students who never attend religious services 18 percent reported that they were absent with an excuse more than ten times. But only 10 percent of Latinos who attend church weekly reported that many absences (Table 17). Of course, being absent with an excuse is hardly a crime, but it does reflect a loss of 'time on task' in school, which has been shown to have important effects on student learning (Bryk, Lee, and Holland 1993). More religious Latinos have more 'time on task' in the classroom because they are not absent from school as much as non–church attenders.

The simple bivariate associations by race show some striking religious effects. The comparisons to other ethnic groups show that whites are the group with the highest number of excused absences, which may reflect class or racial differences in leisure or family dispersion. Latinos are the next highest group with excused absences, though the effect of religious attendance in reducing absences is similar across all ethnic groups except Asians. Surprisingly, in a trend that we will see repeated below,

religious attendance is associated with higher levels of excused absences among Asian teenagers. There is perhaps also some slight evidence that religious attendance among African Americans has the greatest impact in reducing excused absences.



Skipping school is not a crime either, but may contribute to the kind of disengagement from school that eventually leads to dropping out of school. The second measure of staying on-track is the students' reports of whether they skipped school for a full day without an excuse. One of the striking findings here is the very high overall levels of skipping school among Latinos, 46 percent of whom have skipped school for at least a day—the highest among all the ethnic groups. Among Latinos, 38 percent of weekly church attenders skipped school for a day, while 55 percent of the non–church attenders have skipped school (Table 18). The inverse relationship between church attendance and skipping school is about equally strong across most racial and ethnic groups, with only Asians showing the opposite relationship.



A third measure of getting off-track in school is out-of-school suspension. Latinos who report a suspension from school are slightly less likely to be frequent church attenders (Table 19). In contrast to most of our earlier findings, the difference is between those who attend church at all (about 9 per-

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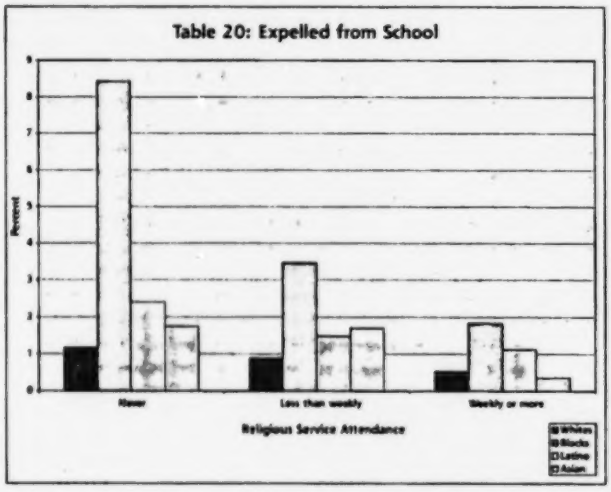
cent report suspension) and those who do not (about 14 percent were suspended). The negative relationship between religion and suspension appears to be a little stronger among whites and African Americans than among both Asians and Latinos, though this may be due to chance variation.



Not surprisingly, being expelled from school is likely to have serious negative consequences for continuing education. While very few kids report being expelled, the findings for Latinos are consistent with the other measures: weekly church attenders have an expulsion rate about half that of those who never attend church (Table 20). Latinos show relatively high levels of expulsion compared to most other groups but are far below the level for African Americans. The effect of religious attendance seems stronger for African Americans, though religious attendance appears to have a significant effect for all groups.

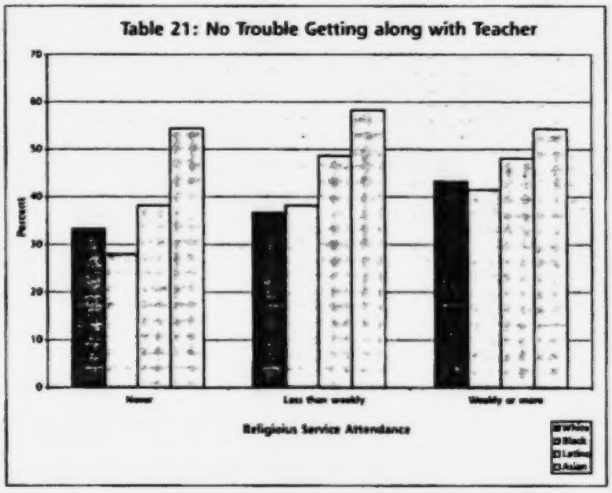
For the regression analysis we created an index that provides an overall assessment of whether the student is getting off-track in school. The index includes measures of GPA, trouble completing homework, trouble getting along with teachers, skipping school without an excuse, receiving an out-of-school suspension, and being expelled.

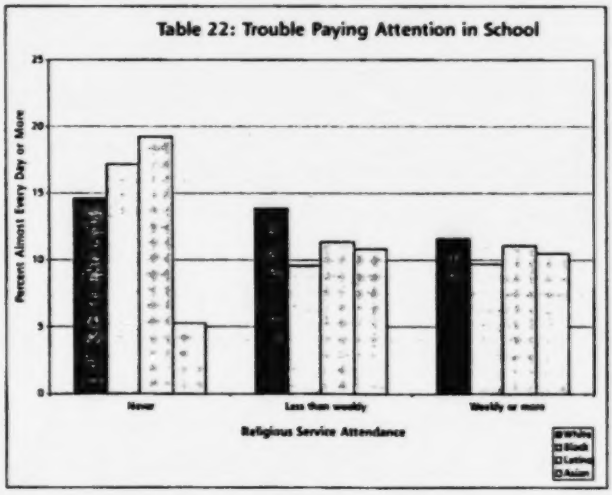
We find that religiosity is strongly negatively associated with being off-track in school among Latino youth, though we don't find evidence that a *change* in religiosity over time is related to being off-track. We don't find strong differences across religious traditions. As in our other models, conservative Protestants and Catholics don't differ much from each other or from Latinos in other religions.

We then constructed a smaller index that focuses on issues of trouble in school. This index is constructed by adding together student responses to whether they have had

trouble 1) getting along with teachers, 2) paying attention in school, 3) getting homework done, and 4) getting along with other students.

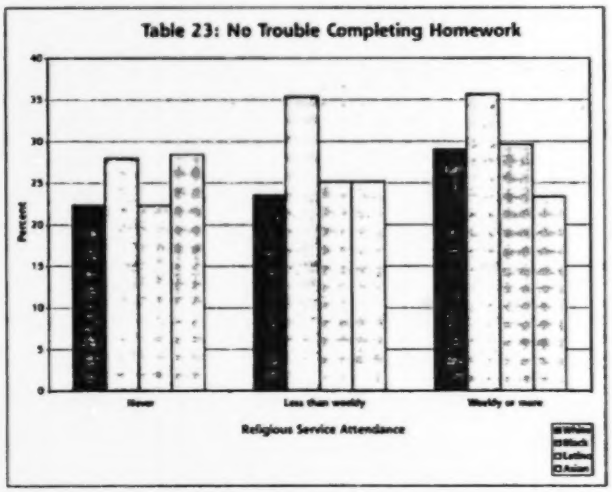
We first show the basic percentages by ethnic group for each of the four variables. The association between religion and getting along with teachers is quite strong for Latinos. Table 21 shows that 48 percent of Latino kids who attend church have no trouble at all getting along with teachers. In contrast, only 38 percent of those who never attend services make this claim. About 19 percent of Latinos who do not attend religious services report that they have trouble paying attention in school almost every day or every day, while only 11 percent of Latinos who attend religious services weekly have trouble to this extent (Table 22). Completing homework has several confounding factors, such as the amount and difficulty of the homework, which may vary across schools, so we are cautious about interpreting simple bivariate associations of this variable. Still, it is worth noting that about 30 percent of those who attend church weekly report that they have no trouble at all completing their homework, while only 22 percent of those who never attend services claim to have no trouble at all completing homework (Table 23). Latino students who attend church regularly are also less likely to have trouble getting along with other students. About 11 percent of Latinos who never attend church have

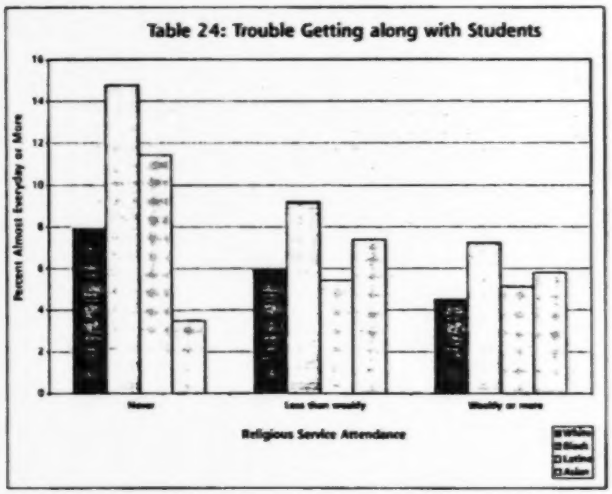




trouble with other students almost every day or more, while only 5 percent of Latinos who attend church weekly have this level of trouble with other students (Table 24).

The regression findings for off-track students extend to this analysis of staying out of trouble in school. What we find is that religiosity of Latino youth strongly mitigates the likelihood that students will have trouble in school. In this case, we don't have stronger evidence of a causal relationship between religion and staying out of trouble, since religious change is not related to trouble in school. But we still find, net of other variables such as socioeconomic status, that religious Latinos are much less likely to experience trouble in school. Thus it seems likely that religiosity and staying out of trouble at school are at least mutually reinforcing.





Educational Aspirations

We also have information on educational aspirations of the student and parent expectations of their children. Since high educational aspirations are ubiquitous in the United States, it is not too surprising that, net of other key demographic variables, religiosity doesn't show strong effects in this dataset on aspirations of Latino adolescents and their parents. However, it is interesting that the Catholic school effect in favor of disadvantaged youth applies. Latino youth in Catholic schools are much more likely to say that their mother

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would be very disappointed if they don't finish high school compared to Latinos in public school. Net of that effect, however, it is interesting that conservative Protestant and Pentecostal parents seem to communicate *higher* educational aspirations than Catholic parents. This could reflect a more strict normative structure in conservative Protestant families, in which failing to meet a goal brings strong disapproval from parents. This finding is encouraging given our concern that conservative Protestantism may contribute to an ethnic enclave effect that would reinforce lower educational values. Religious groups, such as Latino conservative Protestant congregations, that have strong internal social bonds, including high levels of intergenerational closure, may be more successful in passing these high educational aspirations to their children. In this way, the supposed ethnic enclave of conservative Protestant Latino congregations helps to maintain for second- and third-generation Latinos the high achievement ethic of the first generation.

Consistent with our findings for parents of young children, there is some evidence that parents who attend church regularly have higher aspirations for their children, especially when it comes to the goal of graduating from college. But this positive effect is not quite statistically significant in the regression models. Similarly, parents of children in private religious schools tend to have a strong association with wanting their children to graduate from college. There is some evidence that religion matters for educational aspirations of Latino adolescents and parents' aspirations for their adolescent children, though the evidence is not quite conclusive. The mixed results may reflect the age of the kids, since we saw above that religion is strongly related to educational aspirations for first-grade children.

Doing Well in School

Religiosity has additional positive benefits for academic achievement. In our regression models math grades are positively associated with religiosity among Latino teenagers. A change in religiosity seems to have a positive effect on math scores as well, though this effect is not statistically significant. We don't have hard evidence that a change in religiosity provides any additional help on math grades. Overall, however, we do know that Latino teens with higher levels of religiosity in 1994 were doing significantly better in math in 1996.

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The positive effect of religiosity extends to grades in science. Here the effects are even stronger than for math grades. The more religious Latinos are doing better in science. And, providing even more powerful evidence of a causal role for religiosity, the findings show that an increase in religiosity is associated with higher science grades. There is little conflict between religion and science in these findings. While the enclave hypothesis would lead us to expect that higher levels of religious involvement may make Latino kids less open to science, the positive relation between science grades and religiosity suggests the opposite. Religion seems less likely to create a community of closed minds than to create the conditions in which Latino youth excel in school.

Math and science have been major stumbling blocks for many high school students and often act as barriers to college entry and retention. That this applies especially in the case of Latinos (Garcia 2001) makes the role of religiosity in math and science achievement all the more important to realizing the optimistic vision for Latino youth.

Protective Effects of Religion in High Poverty Neighborhoods

We would expect that religiosity of youth is even more important for youth in impoverished schools and neighborhoods. (We are measuring 'impoverishment' by the proportion of people living at or below poverty level as defined by the Census.) In a context marked by scant institutional and civic resources, religious involvement should make an especially large impact on educational success for Latinos compared to the effect of religion on Latino achievement in middle-class neighborhoods. In essence, religious resources may become the last line of defense between disintegrating neighborhoods and communities and the educational success of Latino children.

In the Adolescent Health Survey data we find fairly consistent support for this view. For example, net of our demographic controls, we find that religious service attendance has a stronger impact on paying attention in school for Latino teenagers in high poverty areas compared to those in low poverty areas. And importance of faith helps Latino teenagers in high poverty areas get along with classmates to a greater extent than it helps Latino kids in middle-class neighborhoods. On the other hand, religiosity does not have the same effect on feelings of closeness to classmates in these statistical models. In fact, religious attendance in high poverty

neighborhoods is associated with less closeness to classmates compared to the effect of religious attendance among Latinos in middle-class neighborhoods. Perhaps religion among Latino youth helps them to fit into the normative environment of white suburban schools but creates boundaries against the oppositional student culture in impoverished schools. Importance of faith—but not religious service attendance—seems to have a stronger positive impact on science grades for Latinos in high poverty versus those in low poverty neighborhoods.

Stronger evidence of the special protective effect of religious attendance for Latino youth in impoverished neighborhoods is found in our findings regarding staying on-track in school. For Latino teenagers in impoverished neighborhoods involvement in a religious congregation makes a bigger difference in keeping these kids on-track in school than it does for Latinos in middle-class neighborhoods. And the findings show that religious involvement plays a larger positive role in the *change* in a student's likelihood of being on-track in school for Latinos in high poverty areas compared to low poverty areas.

While the evidence is somewhat mixed, it generally supports our contention that religion is particularly important in protecting impoverished Latino youth. While the concentration of Latinos in inner-city areas may threaten the long-term outlook for Latino social integration in the United States, religion provides an important resource that mitigates this threat. We would also conclude that there is little evidence that religion among Latinos contributes to the type of isolated, inner-city ethnic enclave that would create boundaries between family and public schools and limit Latino social integration and socioeconomic mobility. With the exception of the boundary that religion may create between Latino youth and feeling close to classmates (a boundary that may actually protect Latino youth from the negative impact of oppositional cultures), religion appears to protect Latino youth from the negative educational consequences associated with impoverished schools and neighborhoods.

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Conclusion

As the United States moves toward a population that is one-quarter Latino, the educational successes and failures of the youngest Latino generation will play a pivotal role in what the Latino community and the United States become. The educational trajectory of the large number of young Latinos will shape their economic fortunes and social integration. Whether the youngest generation alters the trends in dropout rates and avoids an oppositional culture or not will have major implications for the economic and political landscape of America, not to mention US race and ethnic relations. Understanding the pathways to educational success for Latino youth sheds light on the possibilities for their social integration and socioeconomic advancement. The pessimistic vision of Latino trajectories points to trends in Latino educational aspirations and achievement as prime evidence of the potential for a permanent Latino underclass. The pessimists are at least right in pointing to the fact that the direction of Latino educational outcomes will reverberate throughout American society.

What we have suggested is that religion plays an important role in the educational success of individual Latino kids. We have argued that church participation makes available resources embedded within social ties marked by trust and reciprocity (i.e., social capital) within congregations. Most of our findings are consistent with our claim that churches give Latinos social capital that contributes to educational success.

We find that Latino students who actively attend church or who see their religious faith as very important to their lives are achieving higher grades in school, are staying on-track in school, are having less trouble with teachers, other students, and homework, and identify with school more strongly. Religious practice is especially important for the educational success of Latino youth living in impoverished neighborhoods. And supervision of Latino teenagers, which is important for keeping children on-track in school, is strongly related to the religiosity of parents. Moreover, parents of Latino first graders are spending more time with their children in ways that are important for educational development and are better equipped to link children to organizations in the community that provide educational opportunities.

We do find some evidence that religious tradition matters for educational outcomes but not much evidence that conservative Protestant Latinos form an ethnic enclave that hinders educational success. We would have expected that the Catholic parish structure opens up opportunities for horizon-expanding networks while not greatly increasing the tension between Catholic teenagers and school and society, in contrast to conservative Protestant communities. But we don't find that the conservative Protestant or Pentecostal Latino communities are doing significantly worse than Catholic Latinos in any of our educational outcomes. And any ethnic enclave effect in the conservative Protestant communities is perhaps offset by the higher educational aspirations that we find in these groups. The tight social bonds in these religious communities may then become an asset for effectively passing on high educational aspirations to children.

Why do we find a positive relationship between religion and educational success among Latinos? We suggest that religion matters for Latinos because it provides important educational opportunities outside of school and that the church environment reinforces the importance of learning and discipline in achieving educational goals. Religiosity among Latinos also strengthens the social capital resources for families and children. This may give Latinos greater access to organizations within a broader community and more information about what educational goals to pursue and how to achieve them. The social networks generated through religious congregations may have the unintended social benefit of linking Latino youth to role models and values that support educational achievement. The overlapping networks of family, church, and school that are generated through high levels of involvement in religion may have the additional benefit of strengthening the social control mechanisms that keep kids on-track and out of trouble.

We suggest that concerns that the intersection of traditional religion and Latino communities may hinder educational success for youth are misplaced. Our evidence is consistent with the opposite view that the educational and social opportunities generated through religion tend to overcome any religio-ethnic enclave effect among Latinos. Based on this evidence, we conclude that religious involvement enhances opportunities for Latino youth to reach their academic potential and helps

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to ensure that they avoid the dire predictions of the pessimistic view of Latino fortunes in the United States.

We can speculate, then, that greater cooperation between Latino churches and schools could enhance the effect of religion on educational success of Latinos. At the very least, researchers, public policymakers, and schools would do well to pay greater attention to resources that are protecting many Latino youth from downward assimilation and countering the underclass threat. One of the important resources for Latino educational success is certainly the strength of religion in Latino families and communities.

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